

# MEDICAL SCHOOL HOTLINE

## Thank You, Joe Anomaly – University of Hawai‘i’s Willed Body Program

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*In 1993, the Medical School Hotline was founded by Satoru Izutsu PhD (former vice-dean UH JABSOM), it is a monthly column from the University of Hawai‘i John A. Burns School of Medicine and is edited by Kathleen Kihmm Connolly PhD; HJH&SW Contributing Editor.*

The Willed Body Program at the University of Hawai‘i, John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) is committed to fulfilling the mission of the university in excellence in education, research, and health care. Human body donations are integral to educational, clinical, and research activities and provide an invaluable role in teaching and training medical and health-related science students and professionals in the complexities of the human body. These silent teachers provide a critical source of education: researchers benefit in discoveries to help and treat patients; the study of anatomy comes early in the medical curriculum and serves as the foundation for medical education; and physicians in residency training and those in practice often pursue special courses in anatomy to enhance their skills and learn new techniques. Each donation directly contributes to new understandings.<sup>1</sup>

While the primary focus of JABSOM’s Willed Body Program is to obtain the human cadaver for educational and scientific study, the program strives to provide a service that is compassionate and respectful. Anatomical donations are precious. Each gift is valued, honored, and appreciated. Students and staff treat each donor with the respect and dignity to all cultures and beliefs. In gratitude and appreciation, a memorial service is held annually for the silent teachers. Since the inception of the program in the late 1970s, services were made open to the public since the 1980s. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Willed Body Program has temporarily stopped accepting body donations as of July 2020, as teaching programs have been reduced, however memorial services continued virtually and can be viewed online in both in Spring 2020 and 2021.<sup>2</sup>

The following speech was to honor and recognize those that have donated their bodies to the Willed Body Program memorial, delivered in 2015 by Dr. Dee-Ann Carpenter, a JABSOM MD graduate, Assistant Professor, as well as a practicing primary care physician in Honolulu.

### Introduction

I was pleasantly surprised to receive an email from a first year medical student asking me to speak at the Willed Body Program that they were having at the end of the academic year, to commemorate those wonderful people who have donated their bodies to science at JABSOM in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. I was honored to have been asked, especially after finding out that this would be the first time an alumna would be part of the program that is usually solely done by the medical students. When asked what I should speak about, the student asked if I could mention how having a willed body to work on while in medical school years ago has helped me in my practice today.

I started thinking of my own time in medical school “living” in my anatomy classroom, not necessarily only during class time. I thought of all of the hours that I put into learning anatomy, of all of the reading that was done during the dissections, of seeing the similarities and differences in other bodies in the room in comparison to mine. As an internist doing primary care, I use this knowledge daily and teach medical students and residents the importance of learning in depth so that information stays with you, even at your medical school reunion over 20 years later.

I not only thought about all of the invaluable anatomy that I had learned, but I also had to thank those families of the donors who had willed their body to science. I had to speak with respect to their family members, and omit the medical jargon, as the audience would mostly be lay people, not doctors. This, I found, not to be a simple task.

### JABSOM Willed Body Program Memorial Commemoration - April 10, 2015

Aloha kakou faculty, students, most importantly friends and family of our Willed Body donors,

Mahalo for being here.

Mahalo for asking me to speak to you today. I understand that this is the first time an alumna has been invited to be part of the Willed Body Ceremony.

And ... mahalo for allowing your own closure with your family member to be postponed because of the willingness of that person who donated their body to science and learning.

It was almost 30 years ago when I was a first year medical student just like those before you, and I was excited to be in Gross Anatomy lab. The first time I went into the lab, I had to step out and get a breath of fresh air. It also gave me time to think of WHO was in the lab. Those wonderful people who gave the ultimate gift—to will their body to help future physicians learn the best way possible, with hands on experience.

I can tell you that memories of learning from my willed body are still fresh in my mind. I've always enjoyed anatomy; it was one of my favorite subjects. I would spend HOURS in the anatomy lab, and enjoyed every minute. I continue to use what knowledge I've gained in my everyday clinic and hospital work.

Back in my day, we didn't get the name of our body until the end of the year. So, our group aptly named our man "Joe". This was a very appropriate name, as we learned, and later called him "Joe Anomaly". When you work in the anatomy lab, you learn that 90% of the time, the so and so artery veers off to the right at a 30 degree angle, but in 10% of the population, it veers off to the left. Our Joe Anomaly veered off to the left. With almost everything that we learned, our Joe did the uncommon. It was because of what I learned that is common, and what is not, that I continue to understand anatomy today. I use what I've learned about the beginnings and ends (what we call origins and insertions) of muscles and its surrounding arteries, nerves and veins, to find out what's wrong with my patient in the clinic, and can picture in that patient what happened in an injury.

Joe Anomaly also had some cool surgeries done, and when we opened his abdomen and pelvis, we found a tube where the main artery, the aorta, should have been. That was my first look at a bypass for peripheral artery disease, as the "tube" continued down into both legs.

I remember one example of another classmate's body where we found the appendix (usually found in the right lower quadrant (RLQ)) up in the right upper quadrant (RUQ) near the liver. From then on, when someone had RUQ pain, and as an internist you come up with the arm's length list of all of the possibilities that it could be, I would include appendicitis. No one would believe me, but I saw it with my own eyes. I put together the embryology that we learned, and realized that the gut hadn't rotated before entering the abdomen and therefore was in a different place.

Imagine yourself undergoing surgery. If the surgeon didn't know all of the normalities and abnormalities that could be, there could be problems in the operating room. Everyone is different. We may have all of the same STUFF inside, but it's not all put together the exact same way. I'd like to thank Joe Anomaly for teaching me this.

I learned respect, care of people as people, working together (in a group with my peers), how to understand anatomy and the ways things are put together as well as how they work, with Joe Anomaly.

Everyone will have their own stories, but I'd like to think that I had the best body ever to work on. And, I thank his family (to this day) for allowing me to learn from him.

Mahalo to all of you, and for taking the time to be here with us to commemorate the wonderful gift your family member has offered us. Because of you, we will all be the best physicians that we can be to help care for you.

Aloha.

For more information on the JABSOM Willed Body Program, please contact the University of Hawai'i, Department of Anatomy, Biochemistry and Physiology, Willed Body Program: phone 808-692-1445; email [wbdonor@hawaii.edu](mailto:wbdonor@hawaii.edu).

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## References

1. Willed Body Program. John A. Burns School of Medicine Website. <https://jabsom.hawaii.edu/donors/willedbody/>. Updated September 10, 2020. Accessed February 22, 2021.
2. Willed Body Program Annual Memorial Service. John A. Burns School of Medicine Website. <https://jabsom.hawaii.edu/donors/willedbody/annual-memorial-service/>. Accessed February 22, 2021.